

## What, only two heads? The Hydra of VET research

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## Key conclusions, purpose & argument

- Key conclusions after several research projects
  - Social, economic & cultural changes blurring the sectoral divide
  - Government policy can enable or hinder but not stop changes, however government policy shapes outcomes
  - VET will need to offer higher level qualifications – including HE – if it is to fulfil its traditional functions
  - Emerging tertiary education sector more hierarchical & stratified
- Purpose
  - Discuss factors driving changes to sectoral divide
  - Explore new institutional types that are emerging
  - Discuss challenges facing single tertiary education sector
- Argument
  - Need to strengthen voice of teachers

## Overview

- Draw from variety of projects – mainly NCVET mixed-sector project & quality of VET teaching project
- Two ways of organising tertiary education
- The Australian anomaly – tracked & unified tertiary education systems
- 3<sup>rd</sup> wave of HE expansion – theorise using Trow's elite, mass, universal framework
- Broad drivers for change
- New institutional types emerging – mixed-sectors – 90 mixed-sectors
- One sector emerging – hierarchical & stratified
- Challenges facing a single tertiary education sector
- Implications for teachers
- Need to strengthen the voice of teachers – professional body

## Two ways of organising tertiary education

- Differentiated systems
  - Tracked VET & HE – relatively stable labour market destinations, allocate graduates to job vacancies & careers draw from differentiated knowledge base in each
  - Northern European systems, social partnerships to match graduates to jobs
- Unified systems
  - More fluid labour markets, changing knowledge & skills, employers need industry-specific but also broader knowledge & skills, less differentiated knowledge base
  - Anglophone liberal market economies – use market as mechanism match graduates & jobs

## The Australian anomaly

- Australia unusual: has a liberal market economy, but a differentiated system in a relatively undifferentiated labour market
- Structure of tertiary education – two sectors
- Differentiated curriculum aligned with the sectors
  - Curriculum based – or input based in HE
  - Competency-based training in VET

## 3<sup>rd</sup> wave of HE expansion in Anglophone countries

- 1<sup>st</sup> period – 1950s & 1960s – new universities & new HE sector in UK & Australia, growth of system in US
- 2<sup>nd</sup> period – 1980s – creation of a unified *university* system
- 3<sup>rd</sup> period – 2000s - through 2<sup>nd</sup>, vocational tier of tertiary education
- Rationale - vocational 'applied' focus – better meet industry needs, more supportive pedagogy etc
- Public policy role for TAFE in HE – but no funding yet

## Theorising this:

### Trow's framework – elite, mass & universal HE systems

- Elite – up to 15%; mass – 16-50%; universal – 50% & above
- Elite – prepare social elite, curriculum 'shapes mind & character', highly structured academic & professional knowledge, strong boundaries between institution & society
- Mass – prepare segment of population for broader range technical & economic leadership roles, curriculum modular, semi-structured, fuzzy boundaries between institution & society
- Universal – prepare whole population for rapid social & technological change in advanced industrial society, boundaries between knowledge & everyday, & institution & society break down.
- Elite, mass & universal different aspects of one system, & sometimes in one institution (eg, medicine is elite everywhere)
- Trow thought all this is good & necessary

## Broad drivers for change

- Responding to changes in economy & society
- Increasing number of jobs require degrees as entry level qualification
- Loose 'fit' between labour market destinations & qualifications
- VET/TAFE will need to offer higher level qualifications to fulfil traditional role
- Can't sustain argument for curricular differentiation & different sectors
- These changes inexorable
- Government policy & government funding
- Sectors increasingly defined by qualifications accredited in each

## A new type of institution – mixed-sector

- Blurring sectoral divide resulting in new type of institution
- Single-sectors: more than 97% of student load in one sector
- Mixed-sectors: at least 3% but no more than 20% of student load in minority sector
- Dual-sectors: at least 20% but less than 80% of their student load in each sector
- 11 TAFEs offer HE in 5 states – will grow like topsy
- Mixed sector TAFEs mostly below 3% but trajectory towards it
- Franchising set to become a big model – alas

## 90 institutions registered to offer VET & HE

- 22 self-accrediting institutions
  - 16 universities that are or have RTOs
  - 5 dual-sector universities
  - Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
- 68 non-self accrediting institutions
  - 11 TAFEs (including *all* NSW), every state except NT & Tassie
  - 57 private providers
- Central QLD University to become the 6<sup>th</sup> dual-sector university
- University of Canberra & Canberra Institute of Technology?

## One sector emerging – but hierarchical & stratified

- Students not really forthcoming about where they studied – uncertain identities
- TAFEs & private providers wishing to change sectoral designation
- Didn't come across any university that wished to do so
- All compared their provision to 'gold standard' of universities
- Structure of sectoral divide very important – includes or excludes
- Can't ignore the sectoral divide – it will exist
- Government policy shape *form* of sectors (& divide) – enable or inhibit

## Challenges facing a single tertiary education sector

- What is *higher* education & how do we know when we see it?
- Need more streamlined regulation of the sectors
- Differences between sectors qualitative, not categorical
- More attention to articulation & pathways – curricular coherence & support
- TAFE will always be under scrutiny
- Build capacity in TAFEs & other non-university providers
- Need consistent policies & *public funding* for HE in TAFE – equity issue

## Implications for teachers

- More attention now on VET teachers than in last 20 years
- Multiple purposes of VET, contexts & students
- Qualifications now required to serve multiple purposes
- Professionalise the workforce
- Will need higher level qualifications
- Differentiated national PD plan required

## Teachers' voices

- Damage to 'brand Australia'
- A choice: further regulation or support teachers' professionalisation
- Teachers need to take professional responsibility for developing the knowledge base of practice & their own qualifications
- What about the AQTF?
- A tertiary teachers' professional body
- Government support to develop the *profession* – better investment
- A Hydra? The ancient Greek snake